DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 961 CS 006 470

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TITLE Key Words and Other Ways to Teach Beginning Reading.
PUB DATE Jan 82
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Claremont Reading Conference (49th, Claremont, CA, January 14-15, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; *Language Experience Approach; Learning Motivation; *Learning Readiness; *Learning Theories; Primary Education; Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Instruction; *Teaching Methods; Vocabulary Development; Writing (Composition); Writing Readiness

ABSTRACT

Four elements are essential for efficient, effective, and rewarding teaching of beginning reading. The first is the use of children's key vocabulary. Children are asked, in a prescribed fashion, what their very best word is of the moment. The teacher prints it in a prescribed fashion and uses it to help children acquire one-to-one correspondence or knowledge of the alphabet and left to right directionality for penmanship, and to prevent reversals. The second element is the use of an experience chart in which the teacher encourages the children to talk about whatever is important to them on a given day. These experiences are then translated by the teacher and posted on the wall. The third element is the use of constant daily writing, including the incidence of invented spelling, and the fourth element is the use of trade or library books to read aloud. Each of these elements provides a clear prescription of how to proceed, not a prescription of learning content itself. (HOD)

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KEY WORDS AND OTHER WAYS TO TEACH BEGINNING READING .

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Dr. Veatch is nationally known for her writing and lecturing about non-commercial approaches to the teaching of reading, writing, and literacy in general. Author of several texts and many articles, she retired from Arizona State University in 1975, and has maintained a busy professional and personal schedule since, including one spring semester in 1977 at the Amrican Samoa Community College.

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Key words, or more accurately, Key Vocabulary, to use the original phrase of Sylvia Ashton Warner over a decade ago, is a major element in approaches that start children. or for that matter, illiterate adults, on the royal road to literacy. Its central thrust is that it works to have children give words of their own, that cannot be presented a-head of time in any manner, shape, or form, nor can they be anticipated and therefore printed in a text, workbook, or teacher's manual.

The strength of the practice of using pupil's own language enables what is called "the language experience approach" to take off like a winged bird. At this conference I welcomed the critical comments of Elliot Eisner about the "cognitive domain", and wish to add a few words of my own in the same vein. The author of these"domains", cog-nitive, affective and psycho-motor, Benjamin Bloom, seems unconcerned that this itemizing, yea,atomizing policy of doubtful utility has loosed the dogs of war upon hapless children everywhere. Because he has so analyzed the nature of WHAT children learn, he has provided the behaviorists, the mastery learning folk, and the machine programmers with a field day of setting up programs allowing adults to impose prescribed content which requires a kind of persuasion and "motivation" even brain washing, if you will, for children to accept the necessity of their trying to learn what has to be gibberish and nonsense, at least in the beginning. Their protestations that eventually understanding will reign leaves me unimpressed. I am opting for prescribed processes, not prescribed content, to be learned. If the former obtains, the latter will follow.

May I suggest that there is no more confused area in education nationwide, even worldwide, than that which lies about the nature of imposed learning of prescribed content.

To make myself clear, let me present a continuum which I believe clarifies how children learn to read, or learn anything. If we drew a continuum of extremes of instruction, we would find on one end that of "laissez-faire" and on the other,"authoritatianism". To describe the former, we would need to state that each learner can do as he pleases, make any choice desired of what is to be learned, without any significant planning, organization, or systematic procedures. It is all choice and no plans.. On the other hadd, the authoritarian pattern is highly planned, systematized, and organized to prevent choice. On that end of the continuum pupils have no choice whatsoever of what is to be learned.

I feel that each of these are damaging, destructive, and ineffectual as far as learning is concerned. I would suggest a middle ground, a point of Aristotelian balance, a mid-point, if you will. What I feel is needed is a plan, a system, an organization that guarantees pupil choice. This, obviously, is right in line with the basic idea of democracy, let alone its value as a way to teach.There is, perhaps no aspect of instruction more misunderstood by parents, teachers, and their college professors of education, than the need for systematic, orderly,non-chaotic methodology to provide self=selection of content to be learned. The violation of the teachings of John Dewey is gross on this score. "Progressive Education" has been castigated, erroneously, I think, but nevertheless castigated,as a way of living in the classroom where the little darlings could so as they please without control. I want control AND choice of content.

To understand my position against Benjamin Bloom's work is to realize that because he isolated, however, masterfully, he was a god send to publishers, et al, who develop commercial programs designed to prescribe content. It is in this prescription that I find such danger

to the learning process. If one were to list the most widely selling reading programs in reading alone, of last twenty years, objective observers would have to question themselves as to the value, let alone the viability, of these successive commercial enterprises.

The national scene finds very few authorities who openly criticize the system of basal readers. Leland B. Jacobs, Yetta and Ken Goodman, Nancy Larrick and myself are a few. It is no wonder that classroom teachers know not where to turn when the realize that pages of drill exercises simply do not work. Thus they bow their heads and meekly follow the precepts of the particular commercial program they are inflicted with. Yet the good sense of teachers has been found now and then.

In 1980 a study of schools with increasing reading scores the teachers were given some leeway in choosing the commercial program, and when using it were allowed to deviate from the manual as their good sense dictated.* This was in direct contrast to schools with decreasing scores, who had no leeway in choice of program or manner of implementation.

All of the preceding has been a kind of introduction to my main presentation which embodies these elements I consider crucial: systematic organization to guarantee choice of pupil idea.

Back to Key Vocabulary. CHildren are asked ,in a prescribed fashion, what their very best word is of the moment. Done correctly, which is why the process IS prescribed, each child will spontaneously explode with a dramatic word such as "ghost" or "monster" and the like. Such responses have been reported from all over the world indicating some kind of universality of language which is little understood. However that may be, the teacher getting such a word, prints it in a prescribed

* Report on the Special Studies of Selected E.C.E. Schools with Increasing and Decreasing Reading Scores. Dept. of Education, Sacramento, Cal. 1980

fashion, uses it to help children acquire one to one correspondence of knowledge of the alphabet, left to right directionality for penmanship and the prevention of reversals (NOT a learning disability!) initial phonemes, but most importantly that he has "words in his head"! A crucial realization for any act of reading. Knowing his own words, and combining them with those seen on the daily news chart provides a bank of words for written composition. Writing is, of course, the best precursor for reading that we know of.

This leads me to another major segment for instruction in beginning reading. It is usually termed the "experience chart" although it is not always so that children's own experiences are used. This is a procedure in which the teacher encourages the children to talk about whatever is important to them on a given day. The teacher then listens and acts as a kind of editor, or transformer, or translator, turning spoken language into written lagguage which is the modality needed for learning to read. If done correctly, again why directions are needed to prescribe the way to do it, a 70-80 word "newspaper" of several of the ideas appear in front of the children. The teacher can then use these products for teaching many skills-- rhyming words, initial phonemes, punctuation, multisyllable words, etc. I recommend that a space on the wall be cleared so that each day's paper can be put up and thus become a reference for children seeking to spell a "sight" word, or any word unknown. To reread such a chart is to have a sensible reason for self-drill.These works become a genuine refer= ence for childrne who become resourceful in seeking help on their own. Friday could be the day that the week's "news" could be duplicated and sent home with each pupil for a marvelous chance to show off reading ability at home.

This leads me to another segment of beginning literacy, the implementation of writing, written composition. The recent work of Charles Read, and Donald Graves, and others has revitalized the teaching of the art of composition to gladden the hearts of the dispirited. Constant daily writing, based upon needs to express ideas, without imposition of adult ideas from the teacher, the weaving in of the names of the letters of the alphabet, the incidence of "invented" spelling,(really another word for phonetic spelling) lays a firm base for one of the great arts of a civilized world. No society prospers without writing.It is interesting to note that children who know their alphabet on a one to one basis, at amazingly young years, are able to write letters or words in a phonetic way, and so lay the foundation for accurate spelling in the later grades.

My last element in my pantheon of beginning reading or literacy is that of the extensive use of ggod books, by both teachers and children. I refer to trade books, or library books to the uninitiated. From the earliest of years, first in the family, into pre-school and then to kindergarten and beyond, children should hear adults reading aloud from the richest treasures of the civilized world, our books. How else are children to learn what books are all about unless they see and hear them read aloud. To follow along, to look at the pictures, to chant repetitive phrases, all this, and more ,too, teaches children about such printed miracles. How better to teach those children struggling with a school language, than to hear that language telling a gripping story.

Thus I conclude my presentation of five elements I consider essential for efficient, effective, and marvelously rewarding teaching of beginning reading. Note that in each case there is clear prescription of HOW to proceed so that spontaneous pupil ideas will result. Note also that in each case, there is no prescription of learning content itself. The necessity of the aspect of skills comes from these spontaneous idea. If the Bloom taxonomy is useful at all, it is too provide a kind of checking the various needs of spelling, of word recognition are apparent. Not to be taught before reading and writing take place, but to be assessed AFTER the act .

The processes are prescribed. Their yield is not. Motivation, not teacher titillation,fires the inner learning boilers. Independent thinking, rather than parrotting items of learning. Independent writing rather than drill on workbook pages.

Best of all, the sheer thrill and enjoyment of teaching and learning in these kinds of classroom energizes all who live there. Monday mornings, then , become the best day of the week.